

'Do you all want to die? We must throw them out!': Class Warfare, Capitalism, and Necropolitics in *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan*

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The undead, and the notion of life beyond death, have long been important components of gothic literature, and, arguably, this is increasingly the case in modern popular culture. Carol Margaret Davison has noted that 'many gothic works meditated on death and death practices as a signpost of civilisation'.¹ This essay explores the ways in which 'undead practices' function as a signpost of social inequality in a society, with zombie narratives as a useful tool for theorising death and death practices. In particular, the link between zombies and necropolitics (where it is decided which people in society live and which will die) is made explicit in the South-Korean films *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan*.² As I argue here, in these films, zombies are culturally representative for a South-Korean audience that is viewing them, and moreover, are connected to South-Korean death practices. I argue that these films highlight important necropolitical practices in South-Korean society today, with South-Korean audiences experiencing these zombie narratives differently to models outlined in previously published work on Western consumption of zombie narratives.

As Achille Mbembe has proposed, necropolitics could be described as 'the ultimate expression of sovereignty' when it comes to 'the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die', a formulation that, as this essay argues, can usefully be applied to the zombie horror genre, and specifically to *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan*.³ This essay covers the way that these films represent necropolitical practices in South Korea in terms of work and labour, and of political hierarchies that have emerged in South-Korean society because of this. This essay utilises the concept of cinesexuality and work on zombies by Patricia MacCormack, who argues that films can evoke specific, distinct responses from domestic audiences, due to the presence of symbolism specific to the films' cultures of origin, evoking a deeper pleasurable

¹ Carol Margaret Davison, 'Trafficking in Death and (Un)dead Bodies: Necro-Politics and Poetics in the Works of Ann Radcliffe', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 14 (2015), 37-48 (p. 39).

² *Seoul Station*, dir. by Yeon Sang-ho (Studio Dadashow, 2016); and *Train to Busan*, dir. by Yeon Sang-ho (Next Entertainment World, 2016).

³ Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', trans. by L. Meintjes, *Public Culture*, 15.1 (2003), 11-40 (p. 11).

experience than for those watching without these cultural referents. I argue here that this framework means that South-Korean domestic zombies symbolise a particular necropolitical inequality when it comes to class and labour that is specific to South Koreans, in opposition to Western offerings, which often symbolise over-consumerism.

The story of *Seoul Station* (a prequel to the events of *Train to Busan*) centres on a young ex-prostitute and runaway named Hye-sun. She has run away from her former brothel but has ended up with little money and a boyfriend who wishes to pimp her out again. Hye-sun represents a class of women who started to arrive in Seoul from the 1970s onwards, called ‘*mujakjŏng sanggyŏng sonyŏ*’, which can be translated as ‘a girl who came to the capital without any plans’.⁴ In her attempts to escape from the zombies she encounters, she is often hindered by authority figures such as police and soldiers, and the only help she receives is from the homeless community. She dies at the end of the narrative, with few people mourning her loss, only disappointed that they can no longer use her body for labour, making hers a necropolitical death. Her story reflects specific South-Korean anxieties over their newly developed class structure. *Train to Busan* similarly reflects on current South-Korean anxieties over class. The protagonist Seok-woo is a workaholic who is taking his young daughter Su-an on the train from Gwangmyeong Station to Busan. It soon becomes apparent that zombies are on the train and at the stations where the train subsequently tries to stop. The film’s narrative shows how class and necropolitics dictate decisions made by characters on the train as to who is ‘worthy’ of living and who should die. This is epitomised in a scene where the rich, bourgeois, CEO character Yon-suk moves healthy survivors out of ‘his’ train carriage. He convinces the other first-class passengers to throw out the survivors from down the train, exclaiming ‘[d]o you all want to die? We must throw them out!’ This scene is at the epicentre of South-Korean anxieties about class, and frustrations around how rich elites have in the past disregarded human life for profit.

These films can be understood through the lens of Peter Dendle’s 2007 essay ‘The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety’, which argues that zombies should not be read as simply a paranormal entity, as they are often used to highlight important contemporary social issues. For example, Dendle asserts that the 1932 film *White Zombie*, directed by Victor Halperin, locates the zombie as highlighting the ‘alienation of the worker from spiritual

⁴ Jin-Kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 86.

connection with labour and from the ability to reap reward from the product of labour'.⁵ Dendle suggests that later zombie movies, such as those by George A. Romero, portray society as nihilistic, and a 'sign of an over-leisurely society, unchecked power and its desires for consumption'.⁶ Critical responses to the zombie film tend to focus on this later interpretation of the zombie as a symbol of consumption, leaving a gap in literature for different interpretations of the zombie, which this essay aims to fill, arguing that the zombie in South-Korean narratives has a necropolitical focus as opposed to one relating to consumption; a consumption allegory is a Western zombie narrative trait rather than one that can be applied to global cinema. South Korea has had domestically successful zombie anthologies, and films such as *The Neighbor Zombie*, *Goeshi*, and *Doomsday Book* differ from Dendle's model by focusing on family and societal hierarchies as opposed to consumption habits. The two films analysed here follow this tradition in South-Korean cinema zombie narratives.⁷

Train to Busan was the first South-Korean zombie movie to be hugely successful on the international market, making \$85 million, compared to films such as *The Neighbor Zombie*, which barely made \$17,000 on the international market.⁸ It is therefore important, following MacCormack's model, to examine the cultural specifics of these films, as they are now reaching a wider audience. Although early scholarly work on the zombie noted the contribution of stories of voodoo zombies from Haiti and other diverse cultural narratives, recent scholarly analysis of the zombie has tended to have an Anglo-centric basis.⁹ For *Train to Busan* and *Seoul Station* in particular, an eagerly awaited sequel, *Peninsular*, is expected in late 2020 and is expected to also

⁵ Peter Dendle, 'The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety', in *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. by Niall Scott (New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 45-57 (p. 46).

⁶ Dendle, 'The Zombie as Barometer', p. 54.

⁷ *The Neighbor Zombie*, dir. by Hong Young-guen and Jang Yun-jeong (Indiastory, 2010); *Goeshi*, dir. by Kang Boem-gu, (Hanrim Films, 1981); and *Doomsday Book*, dir. by Kim Jee-woon and Yim Pil-sung (Zio Entertainment, 2012).

⁸ Box Office Mojo, 'Train to Busan', n. d.

<<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=trainobusan.htm>> [accessed 1 October 2019]; and IMDB, 'The Neighbor Zombie' n. d. <https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt1603461?rf=cons_tt_atf&ref_=cons_tt_atf> [accessed 2 October 2019].

⁹ Dendle, 'The Zombie as Barometer', p. 46. See also Christian Moraru, 'Zombie Pedagogy: Rigor Mortis and the US Body Politic', *Studies in Popular Culture* (2012), 34, 105-27 (pp. 106-07); Kyle William Bishop, 'Vacationing in Zombieland: The Classical Functions of the Modern Zombie Comedy', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* (2011), 22.1, 24-38; Justin Ponder, 'Dawn of the Different: The Mulatto Zombie in Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead*', *Journal of Popular Culture* (2012), 45.3, 551-71; Helen K. Ho, 'The Model Minority in the Zombie Apocalypse: Asian-American Manhood on AMC's *The Walking Dead*', *Journal of Popular Culture* (2016), 49.1, 57-76, (p. 59); and Tim Lazendorfer, *Books of the Dead: Reading the Zombie in Contemporary Literature* (USA: University Press of Mississippi, 2018), p. 10.

do well on the international market, making these films ripe for academic analysis distinct from this Anglo-centric base. Although I focus on analysing these films through a different cultural lens, previous work by Helen Ho on *The Walking Dead* does offer a starting point for an analysis of the films examined in this essay. She states that

Zombie narratives [...] offer a unique lens through which to investigate our current social structures and relations: wholly nested within existing structural frameworks of race/gender/class, viewers are given the opportunity to watch survivors on screen who test, challenge, or dismantle those frameworks as they establish a new social order.¹⁰

While Ho uses this lens to then investigate American social structures, this essay uses this idea to look at social structures/relations from a South-Korean point of view. Although South-Korean zombie movies have many commonalities with their American-produced counterparts (including lots of gore and special effects), the social issues that are found within these films connect specifically with the class divides and necropolitics that South Korea is currently facing. This essay therefore utilises American-based readings of zombie films, which suggest that zombie films hold allegorical symbolism for class relations and consumption habits to Americans, and applies them with an awareness of the specificity of the South-Korean setting. South-Korean spectators will experience their zombie movies through their own cultural lens, and, as I argue in this essay, their zombie narratives rarely, if at all, symbolise over-consumption, but instead focus on necropolitical issues that are present in South-Korean society.

As a means of moving beyond such American-focused readings, Patricia MacCormack's theory of 'cinesexuality' provides a useful theoretical framework through which to discuss these films. She argues that horror films (especially zombie films) can break established societal 'rules' (such as heterosexuality and the nuclear family being preferred dominant modes of society) due to the discomfort and effects of pain that a spectator experiences while watching zombies tear apart everyone – not just those with a poor social standing. As MacCormack asserts,

They are not wolves or women (because they are no longer striated and signified within a human taxonomy) but they are human to the extent that they belong to the same form-structure, albeit increasingly tentative depending on their state of dishevelment. If their

¹⁰ Ho, 'The Model Minority', p. 60.

bodies are our bodies, and we desire them while they are impossible non-cinematically, disgusting in their resemblance, then it is our bodies which must resemble theirs.¹¹

MacCormack argues that cinema is one of the most prolific modes of modern communication and that 'it is able to mask ideology behind claiming to be fictional'.¹² Consequently, for the viewer, cinema is able to 'affirm possible realities'.¹³ MacCormack notes that in Western filmmaking, for instance, the ways in which woman are taught 'how to be an attractive desirable woman' in society is reflected in actresses chosen for mainstream films, helping solidify this 'reality'.¹⁴

This essay argues that the films analysed here integrate necropolitical ideology so as to 'affirm' a reality that South Koreans live every day, in that many of these narratives highlight contemporary social inequality, and the use of zombies as a 'death practice' tries to expose this inequality. I also argue that this is why zombie films from South Korea are different allegorically to those in Western cinema, in that cinesexuality acknowledges that a spectator's experiences will affect their interpretation of the film:

If viewing self includes a modality of memory (including individual and social history) assembled as an immanent remembered present with screen, then the particularities of that memory, including its oppressions, subjugations and powers, are co-present with the event. One's self is mapped according to the importance placed on these memories and the modal configurations they make with the present self.¹⁵

In this sense, cinesexuality highlights how a spectator's experiences of power dynamics and cultural memories are mapped onto the film they are watching. A reading incorporating MacCormack's idea of cinesexuality thus stresses the extent to which South-Korean spectators to have a culturally and socially important connection to the film, in much the same way that Americans may experience their own culturally embedded anxieties when experiencing American-produced zombie media texts. This assertion emerges from one of MacCormack's most important points in *Cinesexuality* – that spectatorship is 'less about the object of analysis,

¹¹ Patricia MacCormack, *Cinesexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 112.

¹² MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ MacCormack, 'A Cinema of Desire: Cinesexuality and Guattari's Assignifying Cinema', *Women: A Cultural Review* (2005), 16.3, 340-55 (p. 342).

¹⁵ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 35.

apprehension or perception and more about the means by which that object is experienced'.¹⁶ More usefully for my purposes here, MacCormack goes on to explain that zombie-gore cinesexuality in particular involves 'desire for that which is immediately recognizable as us and not us, so the way we can conceive body as form is opened up as a series of "assigned planes"'.¹⁷ What this suggests is that zombie bodies allow spectators to impose their own interpretations onto these bodies and this can also offer the chance to examine how spectatorship can become an act of activism or ethics.

Tim Huntley argues that a cinesexuality framework means that 'the viewer must become other', and that this is imperative when it comes to the ethical viewing of cinema.¹⁸ Huntley contends that 'cinesexuality promotes a case for difficult thought and painful thinking that shares a relation both metaphorical and metonymical with difficult watching; painful viewing'.¹⁹ Not only does cinesexuality then work as a productive framework for analysing zombie narratives, due to the actual physical repulsion experienced by viewers when watching zombies cannibalise humans on screen, but also because zombie narratives often represent 'painful' social issues such as inequalities of race, class, and gender.²⁰ As I argue here, this model of cinesexual spectatorship is a useful tool for analysing the experience of South Koreans watching *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan*. Moreover, doing so helps draw attention to the ways in which these films critique many of the necropolitical issues, such as labour, in South Korea today, a characteristic that, I argue, was a contributing factor to their popularity.

Labour and Work

There has been a distinct and rapid shift when it comes to labour and work in South Korea, with the service industry becoming a relatively new one compared to Western countries. This has led to historical tension between different 'necropolitical classes' of people in South Korea, which has become an important part of recent cinema narrative. In *Seoul Station*, necropolitics in South Korea is most evident in the way that the homeless are treated throughout the storyline. In the real-world Seoul Station, homelessness has been a fact of life since 1998, when the Square

¹⁶ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 14.

¹⁷ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 113.

¹⁸ Tim Huntley, 'Abstraction is Ethical: The Ecstatic and Erotic in Patricia MacCormack's *Cinesexuality*', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 8 (2010), 17-29 (p. 17).

¹⁹ Huntley, 'Abstraction is Ethical', p. 18.

²⁰ Moraru, 'Zombie Pedagogy', pp. 106-07.

became infamous as a space ‘where enormous numbers of homeless people resided’.²¹ The South-Korean government made it illegal to sleep in public places to try and rectify this ‘issue’, but these policies were unpopular and often viewed as attempts at social ‘cleansing’. In South Korea, a common derogatory term to describe the homeless is ‘*Purangin* – who wander because they *cannot adjust to a work-place and family life*’.²² For those who use this term, the homeless of Seoul Station are those who do not want to live up to societal standards. Critics argued that these policies were ‘actually designed to protect “regular” citizens who might be offended or harmed in some way by the presence of homeless people’.²³ The idea that the ‘homeless Other’ could ‘offend’ others just by existing is an example of how Mbembe describes the processes through which government authorities decide who deserves to live and who dies; as he asserts, ‘the perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security’.²⁴ For Mbembe, in both early and late modernity, this imagined threat means that the ‘Other’ is created by those in power for reasons not based in fact.²⁵

In a powerful set of scenes in *Seoul Station*, the first infected person, and then fully turned zombie, is a homeless man who resides at the Square. In the first fifteen minutes of the film, we watch the old homeless man become sick and die, despite the best efforts of his homeless friend to receive help from a pharmacist and the police, all of whom turn him away due to seeing the homeless duo as pests and troublemakers. Here, then, the homeless Other is no longer an imagined threat but a real one. Shaka McGlotten proposes that ‘zombies are [...] a radicalized underclass, a group of revolutionaries united by their shared oppression and arrayed against the capitalist powers that be and those seduced by them’.²⁶ In cinesexual terms, then, the use of a *Purangin* as the first zombie to appear can be interpreted as symbolic for the South-Korean spectator. As MacCormack puts it,

²¹ Jesook Song, ‘The Seoul Train Station Square and Homeless Shelters: Thoughts on Geographical History Regarding Welfare Citizenship’, in *Sittings: Critical Approaches to Korean Geography*, ed. by Timothy R. Tangherlini and Sally Yea (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), pp. 159-72 (p. 160).

²² Song, ‘The Seoul Train’, p. 166, italics in original.

²³ Song, ‘The Seoul Train’, p. 163.

²⁴ Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, p.18.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Shaka McGlotten, ‘Zombie Porn: Necropolitics, Sex, and Queer Socialities’, *Porn Studies* 1.4 (2014), 360-77 (p. 366).

The definitions of the meanings and desires of those bodies that watch may simultaneously be multiplied and investment in any position as opposed to the fictive disappears. It is no longer a question of which are fictive and which realistic, but which are more resonant with established dominant fictions.²⁷

The dominant fiction from the South-Korean government – that the homeless of Seoul Station constitute a necropolitical threat – is brought alive through both films, which, for South-Korean spectators, may evoke the culturally specific social taboo of becoming a *Purangin* themselves. This is also why it is so powerful that the *Purangin* are also among the few characters to try and help Hye-sun survive in *Seoul Station*.

Stephen Shaviro notes that violations of social taboo in horror are significant ‘not so much on account of *what* they represent or depict on the screen as of *how* they go about doing it’.²⁸ This is important when we consider historical representations of the zombie in Eastern cinema, as South-Korean zombie films tend to share more similarities with Western zombie movies than other Eastern cinematic offerings. In Japan for instance, Rudy Barrett has noted, many popular films use the zombie as a form of comedy-relief, because the monster is seen as a Western phenomenon, since the overwhelming majority of Japanese people are cremated rather than buried.²⁹ Therefore, ‘the iconic imagery of zombies rising from the grave is not only culturally disconnected from the mainstream, it’s also completely impossible to depict realistically in Japan’.³⁰ Moreover, Chinese cinema has had little influence on South-Korean zombie films, because, until very recently, the Communist Party censored depictions of zombies (and other supernatural monsters) for ‘promoting cults or superstition’, and only recently allowed international zombie offerings to be shown in their cinemas.³¹ As well as this, the zombies (*jiāngshī*) that are referred to in Chinese folklore would be considered more akin to vampires in their appearance, due to having long claws and a hatred of sunlight. Although there are steadily increasing numbers of zombie films from Hong Kong, mainland China still heavily censors any domestic filmmakers, which has put a constraint on any domestic offerings.

²⁷ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 115.

²⁸ Stephen Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 114.

²⁹ Ruby Barrett. ‘Why Japan Laughs At Zombies: Bbbbraaaaainnnzzz Braaaaainzzz!! HEY! Why Aren’t You Running?!’, *Tofugu*, 24 June 2014 <<https://www.tofugu.com/japan/japanese-zombies/>> [accessed 1 January 2019].

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Charles Clover and Sherry Fei Ju, ‘China Unleashes Zombie Films to Boost the Box Office’, *The Financial Times*, 16 June 2017 <<https://www.ft.com/content/3878eed6-3ebc-11e7-9d56-25f963e998b2>> [accessed 1 January 2019].

This may be why *Train to Busan* and *Seoul Station* display a focus on necropolitical labour of the kind that is found in Western zombie narratives like *Land of the Dead*, *Dead Rising: Watchtower*, and *The Dead Don't Die*.³² However, *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* differ from these US offerings in their representation, as they focus on labour issues specific to South-Korean history. In her work on South-Korean service economies, Jin-Kyung Lee defines necropolitical labour as '[e]xtraction of labor from those "condemned" to death, whereby the "fostering" of life, already premised on an individual's death or disposability of her or his life, is limited to serving the labor needs of the state or empire and capital'.³³ In South Korea, the migration of the rural proletariat into major cities in the latter half of the twentieth century increased this necropolitical labour (as mentioned above), creating an urban middle class, which had not previously existed in great numbers. In South Korea, the creation of a particularly wealthy middle class is therefore a far more recent occurrence than in Western countries; indeed, Myungji Yang argues that this class was created artificially, stating that 'the formation of an urban middle class was a political-ideological project of the authoritarian state to reconstruct the nation and strengthen the regime's political legitimacy'.³⁴ Therefore, surplus female labour in particular led to a new "social-sexual" category of working-class women, that is, as prostitutes on the margins of rapidly industrializing South-Korean society'.³⁵ Not only did this create a new labour category for women but, as Lee also noted, this newly formed middle class experienced 'greater inter- and intragenerational mobility' than ever before.³⁶

However, Shin Arita has found evidence to suggest that this has since stagnated; 'in Korea a person's social consciousness is determined to a large degree by his native region and this cuts across social classes'.³⁷ This may be because South Korea has a different class structure than Western countries, due to South-Korean society's emphasis on collectivism over

³² *Land of the Dead*, dir. by George A. Romero (Universal Pictures, 2005); *Dead Rising: Watchtower*, dir. by Zach Lipovsky (Crackle, 2015); and *The Dead Don't Die*, dir. by Jim Jarmusch (Focus Features, 2019).

³³ Lee, *Service Economies*, p. 82.

³⁴ Myungji Yang, 'The Making of the Urban Middle Class in South Korea (1961-1979): Nation-Building, Discipline, and the Birth of the Ideal National Subjects', *Sociological Enquiry*, 82.3 (2012), 424-45 (p. 424).

³⁵ Lee, *Service Economies*, p. 86.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Shin Arita, 'The Growth of the Korean Middle Class and its Social Consciousness', *The Developing Economies*, 2 (2003), 201-20 (p. 207).

individualism.³⁸ Neil Englehart has argued that this a defining characteristic of Asian cultures, ‘characterized by a set of values that includes obedience to authority, intense allegiance to groups, and a submergence of individual identity in collective identity’.³⁹ And this is still culturally significant today; for example, a comparative study found that homeless teens in the United States display individualistic behaviours, while South-Korean teens display collective group behaviours.⁴⁰ There is even a growing sentiment that the more recent South-Korean move away from collectivism is not even individualistic, but rather a move towards egotism, in that, instead of promoting self-reliance and independence, moral behaviour becomes self-interest. However, this move towards egotism is not seen as a moral behaviour for most South Koreans, and these frustrations appear in *Train to Busan* and *Seoul Station*; the narrative portrays wealthy characters as egotists who only look out for themselves, and this characterisation is seen in other recent popular South-Korean movies such as *Flu* and *Deranged*.⁴¹

Lead character Seok-woo is presented in *Train to Busan* as a middle-class workaholic who is uncaring when it comes to business decisions that have repercussions for others. In conversation with his secretary Kim, he is depicted as callous and comparable in attitude to wealthy CEO Yon-suk who is, as discussed below, depicted in an unambiguously negative light:

Kim: What should we do?
Seok-woo: Sell all related funds.
Kim: Everything?
Seok-woo: Yeah.
Kim: They’ll be serious repercussions. Market stability and individual traders will ...
Seok-woo: Kim?
Kim: Sir?
Seok-woo: Do you work for the lemmings?
Kim: [character pauses]
Seok-woo: Sell everything right away.⁴²

³⁸ Sanna, J. Thompson, Kim Ji-hye, Holly McManus, Patrick Flynn, and Hyangcho Kim, ‘Peer Relationships: A Comparison of Homeless Youth in the USA and South Korea’, *International Social Work*, 50.6 (2007), 783-95 (p. 785).

³⁹ Neil A. Englehart, ‘Rights and Culture in the Asian Values Argument: The Rise and Fall of Confucian Ethics in Singapore’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 22.2 (2000), 548-68 (p. 550).

⁴⁰ Thompson and others, ‘Peer Relationships’, p. 783.

⁴¹ Park Sang-seek, ‘Transformation of Korean Culture from Collectivism to Egotism’, *Korea Herald*, 5 November 2018 <<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20181104000265>> [accessed 13 September 2019]; *Flu*, dir. by Kim Sung-su (CJ Entertainment, 2013); and *Deranged*, dir. by Park Jung-woo (CJ E&M, 2012).

⁴² *Train to Busan*, 00:04:58-00:05:21.

For many South-Korean viewers, while his characterisation becomes more sympathetic as the film's narrative develops, it is likely that Seok-woo would not be seen as an inherently relatable or likeable character to begin with, as he is represented as a ruthless individualist, sacrificing traders (the collective) for personal gain. Some scholars are critical of using social class 'warfare' as a narrative strategy, asserting that the zombie narrative can actually reinforce these supposed norms, rather than challenging these power differentials. But this initial portrayal of Seok-woo is intrinsically important to the South-Korean viewer, in that he represents the new Korean class system, which is criticised as egotistical; however, he ends up redeeming himself later by working back for the 'collective' good. This may give a South-Korean viewer a moment of subversive cinesexual pleasure, due to him resisting a total move into egotism. The overall shift towards individualism by the new middle class is not always seen negatively, but when it moves into the realm of egotism, South-Korean audiences and film narratives prefer to revert back to more traditional collective norms. This is important, in that South-Korean audiences gain a cinesexual pleasure by watching this egotism punished or 'corrected', whereas it is monetarily rewarded in real life, something that is at odds with their values. This also suggests that South-Korean cinema does not end up reinforcing norms.

For Lina Rahm and Jörgen Skägeby, the idea of 'prepping' for the zombie apocalypse and the idealisation of 'how the strongest survive' has reinforced certain negative ideals; they state that 'the zombie metaphor corresponds well to the normative model of the "best prepared body", and reinforces the development of skills and mindsets that are fundamentally sexist, ageist, and ableist'.⁴³ However, in cinesexual terms, zombies do not always reinforce stereotypes but are capable of dismantling them too; for MacCormack, 'the term "zombie" guarantees that any dismantling cannot lead to death and must lead to something else post-death. Viewing zombies does not lead to fear of death but its own "something else."'⁴⁴ Using a cinesexual argument, the zombie in these films can be read, not as signifying literal death but as allegorical for the death of collectivism. This is because many of the zombie-related deaths are caused by a character making an individualistic (or egotistical) choice rather than one that is good for the collective.

⁴³ Lina Rahm and Jörgen Skägeby, 'Preparing for Monsters: Governance by Popular Culture', *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 15 (2015), 76-94 (p. 83).

⁴⁴ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 99.

Furthermore, when thinking in terms of capitalism (which is associated with the rise of individualism), spectators end up realising that Seok-woo embodies the category of cultural zombie – that is, ‘characters who have lost self-identity or the capacity for volition’ – without being a literal member of the undead.⁴⁵ This is because the focus given to corporate culture rather than the health or wellbeing of the collective is an important issue that South Korea is facing; zombies function to scrutinise allegorically this state of affairs throughout the two films. Shaviri argues that the zombie is ‘a nearly perfect allegory for the inner logic of capitalism’.⁴⁶ *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* represent this ‘logic’ as developing at the expense of the collective, producing a South-Korean zombie narrative that is distinct from Western zombie texts, which focus on consumption. To elaborate, Mbembe has argued that necropolitics and necropower account for ‘new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*’.⁴⁷ Seok-woo therefore becomes, for the South-Korean spectator aware of such issues, an imaginative representation of necropolitical labour. The characterisation and eventual demise of Hye-sun in *Seoul Station* also performs this function.

Jin-Kyung Lee proposes that prostitution can also be considered as necropolitical labour, in that it is ‘sexual violence via commercialisation’.⁴⁸ In *Seoul Station*, in death, Hye-sun is still only considered as valuable via the necropolitical labour that she brought her pimp (Suk-gyu) in life. When Hye-sun dies, Suk-gyu initially seems sad at the prospect of her death, but quickly his thoughts turn to the money he has now lost:

Suk-gyu: Wake up! Hey! Hye-sun? Dammit, don’t die, baby! Hye-sun, please don’t, I’m sorry! Hye-sun! It’s all my fault! Please don’t die! Pay me back first, you bitch!⁴⁹

Her death is necropolitical; for Lee, ‘work itself’ can be seen ‘as necessarily incurring injury and harm to the body and mind – work as trauma, violence, and mutilation that indeed lies in continuum with death’.⁵⁰ Hye-sun’s entire worth has been tied into the labour that her body can

⁴⁵ Sang-seek, ‘Transformation of Korean Culture’, n. p.; and Kevin Alexander Boon, ‘Ontological Anxiety Made Flesh: The Zombie in Literature, Film and Culture’, in *Monsters and the Monstrous*, pp. 33-43 (p. 40).

⁴⁶ Shaviri, *The Cinematic Body*, p. 98.

⁴⁷ Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, p. 40.

⁴⁸ Lee, *Service Economies*, pp. 80-82.

⁴⁹ *Seoul Station*, 01:28:20-01:28:47.

⁵⁰ Lee, *Service Economies*, p. 83.

produce. However, viewers may feel some cinesexual pleasure when it is revealed that Hye-sun has become a zombie and proceeds to eat Suk-gyu before the movie promptly ends. McGlotten argues that zombie narratives help to expose the viewer to the ideology of necropolitics and labour, in that they are representative of a body that has been used up in the 'service of profit'.⁵¹ By having Hye-sun turn into a zombie, who then eats the person who was exploiting her labour, the film makes a powerful comment to South Koreans who may feel discomfort surrounding the society's current attitude to work and labour. In addition, McGlotten claims that such films 'allegorize the logical end to capitalist society' and perhaps, for South-Korean audiences, a possible return to a collective mentality, often at the expense of comforts that the political elite have thus far enjoyed.⁵²

Necropolitics and the Political Elite

This criticism of economic individualism appears as a common trope that has appeared in many South-Korean horror or disaster movies; it often comes in the guise of high-level military commanders making decisions that benefit them necropolitically (saving the rich and powerful who keep them in their high-powered positions) or a minority of CEOs who make individualist decisions for profit. In films such as *Flu* and *Deranged*, ordinary citizens who are portrayed as sympathetic protagonists are often oppressed by military forces trying to quarantine 'infected' citizens. In *Seoul Station*, towards the end of the film, the army have quarantined the protagonist Hye-Sun and others in an infected neighbourhood; Suk-gyu (her pimp) tries to get through to her, but is pushed back by the soldiers, who proclaim that the citizens' protesting is simply 'annoying'. The location of the film and the response of the military can be evocative for a South-Korean spectator, in that, until the early 1990s, Seoul Station 'was the site of mass demonstrations urging political action against authoritarian regimes'.⁵³ This ties in with MacCormack's cinesexual assertion that spectators view films with 'established dominant fictions' and nostalgic memory in their minds.⁵⁴ For South-Korean viewers, then, a necropolitical and cinesexual experience may occur because they may have living memory of times where the government took an authoritarian view on who would live and who would die. In *Flu*, both

⁵¹ McGlotten, 'Zombie Porn', p. 365.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Song, 'The Seoul Train', p. 160.

⁵⁴ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 115.

infected and uninfected people are quarantined in the same place by the army and South-Korean government. Even though uninfected individuals were told that they would only be held for forty-eight hours if they remained in good health, officials decide to hold them within the quarantine to keep the rest of the country safe, especially the nearby capital of Seoul. This has necropolitical implications, depicting authoritarian forces that enact a preference for keeping the wealthy who live in the capital 'safe', by letting those who live in the less affluent suburbs and rural areas die. In *Seoul Station*, this fear of the army and government using martial law to create a quarantine is dramatised later when the commander of the police force becomes scared, while notifying Hye-sun's boyfriend that the government was now entirely in control of trying to 'contain' the zombie outbreak. The following exchange takes place:

Ki-woong: What's up with those soldiers? What'll happen now?

Commander: Capital Defence Command [panicked pause] is now in full control.⁵⁵

This fear of governmental control when it comes to disasters, which often require co-ordination from different authorities, may also provide a cinesexual experience when it comes to recent memory for South Koreans, such as the critical response to the government handling of the Sewol Ferry disaster in 2014; the ferry crashed en route from Incheon to Jeju, killing 273 people, many of them high-school students. The South-Korean government was criticised for their botched co-ordinating of the coastguards' rescue attempt, and for also downplaying their own culpability when it came to the poorly enforced shipping regulations, which were a secondary cause in the ship's mechanical difficulties. Using MacCormack's model, disasters such as this allow us to view a lack of confidence in the political elite as a dominant narrative in South Korea, which may constitute a subtext to the containment narratives in *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan*. Using MacCormack's theory then, we can suggest that South-Korean audiences experience a cinesexual pleasure when government officials are overrun in movies later in the narrative.

In *Train to Busan*, the necropolitics concerning South-Korean class warfare are represented via the character of Yon-suk, a wealthy CEO. Since the revival of Korean cinema in the 1990s, an overarching theme has been that of taking revenge against egotistic capitalistic characters. Andrew Lowry attributes this directly to the social upheaval of the time, as 'social

⁵⁵ *Seoul Station*, 01:07:39-01:07:47.

anger was and is directed at business leaders, most of whom stayed quiet and got wealthy while the earlier regime was shooting students in the streets'.⁵⁶ South-Korean horror films that critique wealthy, capitalist characters, who are often depicted as saving themselves at the expense of poorer characters, include *Flu*, *OldBoy*, *I Saw the Devil*, *Snowpiercer*, *Parasite*, and of course *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan*.⁵⁷ A similar critical depiction of the capitalist class is also seen in *Deranged*, in which mutated horse-hair worms infect human beings through the water supply. The infected, being controlled by the worms, begin to consume copious amounts of water or throw themselves into nearby rivers so that the worms can proliferate and infect more humans. By the end of the film, the spectator finds out that, in fact, a group of wealthy CEOs created these worms, knowing that they had the cure stored in warehouses, which they could then sell at top prices to the infected, while also increasing their company's stock prices – and that they had, of course, saved a remedy especially for themselves first.

This compliments the necropolitics seen in *Train to Busan*, as we see Yon-suk use his wealth and position to kill off 'less deserving' passengers. When the train stops at Daejeon Station, which turns out to be overrun by zombies, Yon-suk tries to save himself from the zombie hoard by insisting that the train conductor leave other passengers behind. Later in the film, the protagonist Seok-woo, his daughter Su-an, and a number of other passengers use various measures to combat or avoid zombies as they move through the train cars to get to the first-class cabin car where other survivors, including Yon-suk, are hiding. When Seok-woo confronts and accuses Yon-suk of not saving other passengers, and actively using others as a human shield, Yon-suk convinces the other passengers that Seok-woo is a threat:

Seok-woo: Why did you do it? You bastard! You could have saved them! Why?

Yon-suk: He's infected! He's one of them! This guy's infected! His eyes! Look at his eyes! He'll become one of them! Do you all want to die? We must throw them out!

Train attendant: Those of you who just arrived, I don't think you can stay with us, please move to the vestibule.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Andrew Lowry, 'Slash and Earn: The Blood-Soaked Rise of South-Korean Cinema', *The Guardian*, 31 March 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2011/mar/31/south-korean-cinema-blood-saw-devil>> [accessed 1 October 2019].

⁵⁷ *Oldboy*, dir. by Park Chan-wook (Show East, 2003); *I Saw the Devil*, dir. by Park Hoon-jung (Softbank Ventures Korea, 2011); *Snowpiercer*, dir. by Joon-ho Bong (Moho Film, 2013); and *Parasite*, dir. by Joon-ho Bong (CJ Entertainment, 2019).

⁵⁸ *Train to Busan*, 01:15:50-01:16:39.

Although it can be suggested that Yon-suk is lying about the survivors being infected because he just wants them out of the first-class carriage, and that this scene therefore acts as a characterisation tool, it also highlights the necropolitics surrounding these survivors to the South-Korean spectators. The purpose of the exchange between Seok-woo and Yon-suk makes the ‘othering’ of the survivors apparent. The willingness of the first-class passengers to believe that the survivors are turning into zombies when they are clearly not infected connects closely with Mbembe’s theorisation of making the ‘Other’ into a threat that can legitimately be extinguished.⁵⁹ MacCormack notes that othering of bodies occurs when they are split into majoritarian or minoritarian (part of the elite or part of the minority); she states that ‘minoritarian bodies are signified via their failures to be majoritarian – not female but not-male, not queer but not-heterosexual and so forth’.⁶⁰ In this way, the survivors are already zombie Others, even though they are not infected with the zombie virus. Yon-suk’s willingness to immediately enact necropolitics by judging which passengers are minoritarian compared to his perceived majoritarian self is reminiscent of historical events in South Korea such the April Revolution, where President Syngman Rhee used violence to suppress opposing views.⁶¹ Yon-suk uses misinformation and then violence to try to ensure that he survives, which was a common way previous South-Korean governments operated to keep the masses from overthrowing an authoritarian rule. In cinesexual terms, the positioning of ‘the spectator as a desiring subject and the relation between the image and spectator as a decision toward openness and grace or reification of subject’ means that viewers are directed towards an ethical viewpoint regarding the Yon-suk character, a viewpoint which may be less evident to viewers from a different socio-cultural context.⁶²

However, it is becoming a minoritarian Other that in the end saves the survivors. Upset at the death of her sister and disgusted by the banishment of the survivors, Jong-gil opens up the doors and allows the zombie horde inside the first-class cabin. This is a pivotal scene, due to the reversal of the zombies’ role – from monsters to heroes – as they are used to dispose of the ‘real

⁵⁹ Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, p. 18.

⁶⁰ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 65.

⁶¹ Lee Moon-young, ‘When the April 19 Police Officers Asked the Marshall Commander to Borrow 100,000 Bullets’, *Hani*, 18 April 2011 <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/473473.html> [accessed 30 January 2019].

⁶² MacCormack, ‘An Ethics of Spectatorship: Love, Death and Cinema’, in *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), pp. 130-42 (p. 132).

monsters'. For MacCormack, the tendency to view zombies merely as monsters can become theoretically problematic. She writes,

When publicly disseminated and consumed, the separation of the zombie as Other engenders both discursive and material power differentials. The theoretical nuances and potentially disruptive capacities of zombies-as-monsters are thus lost due to a fundamental rupture and subsequent hostility between humanity and what is now something else. This separation, we argue here, is maintained by the arbitrary, but specific, 'rules of zombies'.⁶³

Therefore, it is vital to explore zombie narratives via a cinesexuality lens, as doing so highlights zombie narratives' potential for creating an ethical experience for the spectator via the figure of the zombie. Shaviro notes this in relation to Romero's zombie movies, arguing that zombies 'serve to awaken a passion for otherness and for vertiginous disidentification that is already latent within our own selves'.⁶⁴ The zombies in *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* are only identifiable (and we are only on 'their side') when they begin disposing of the elite. Spectators of the movie can therefore experience how becoming the minoritarian 'Other', and thus rejecting the class structure present in South Korea, can save them from being cannibalised (by zombies or ideologically). Jong-gil's opening up of the first-class cabin (representing capitalist and corrupt government) to allow the zombies to eat, and thus transform the first-class passengers into the 'Other', may therefore produce powerful cinesexual experiences for South-Korean spectators.

Within this framework, for spectators of *Train to Busan*, Yon-suk's death later in the film offers overt cinesexual pleasure. Yon-suk is characterised in the narrative as a totem for, or crystallisation of, the revelations of corruption that emerged in South Korea in the years preceding the release of the two movies. Specifically, the film's positioning of Yon-suk as using immoral means to stay alive has parallels with the immoral actions of South-Korean government officials and CEOs in real life. For instance, President Lee Myung-bak (2008-13) was associated with the company BBK, which had been implicated in stock-price manipulation in 2007, but he was not arrested until 2018; President Park Geun-hye (2013-17) was impeached six months before the two films release due to corruption.⁶⁵ In cinesexual terms, major corruption so close to

⁶³ Rahm and Skägeby, 'Preparing for Monsters', p. 82.

⁶⁴ Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, p. 113.

⁶⁵ Justin Fendos, 'South Korea Goes from One Presidential Scandal to Another', *The Diplomat*, 3 November 2017 <<https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/south-korea-goes-from-one-presidential-scandal-to-another/>> [accessed 30 May 2019].

the release of these two films could be understood to have affected the viewing process for South Koreans. This is similar to the way in which Shaviro describes how, when watching zombie movies, he ‘enjoy[s] the reactive gratifications of *resentment* and revenge, the unavowable delights of exterminating the powerful Others who have abused [him]’.⁶⁶ For those watching Yon-suk throughout the movie, the tension created by his actions leads to the cinesexual release of watching him pay the consequences (with his death).

A powerful exchange in *Seoul Station* concerning necropolitical labour occurs between a man wearing a ‘Be the Reds’ T-shirt and a homeless man. ‘Be the Reds’ was a phrase used on merchandise for the 2002 FIFA World Cup Korean Republic football team, when the team reached the semi-finals. This image acts as an important signifier even before any words are exchanged, due to the social connotations of ‘Be the Reds’ to South Koreans. Although it was a popular phrase in 2002, controversy befell the slogan when it was trademarked later in 2003. The original artist retaliated by trade-marking the font instead, and thus no official ‘Be the Reds’ shirts were made after this, essentially meaning that capitalist individualism ruined the message of collectivism behind the shirt.⁶⁷ The ‘Be the Reds’ shirt exemplifies to the spectator the social strata within South Korea, the exact opposite of what the shirt and slogan was trying to achieve in the World Cup – a unification. For MacCormack, ‘the question is not how real an image is in encouraging us to address difference, but to what extent it makes us different subjects within a shifted ecology as an environment not of subjects populating a space but a system of differential relations’.⁶⁸ Therefore, the image of the rich character wearing a shirt that is supposed to represent collectivism acting in his own self-interest can have a cinesexual effect on the spectator; South Koreans are told that they should all be industrious for the good of South Korea, but instead find themselves in a corporate workplace culture that horror films like *Train to Busan* and *Deranged* criticise.

The ‘Be the Reds’ shirt also serves as a sign of the concomitant visual othering of the homeless man, which many South Koreans will experience in a culturally charged way due to the treatment of the homeless at Seoul Station referred to above. Yang argues that, in the 1960s, when the middle class was being created by government incentives, the government employed

⁶⁶ Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, p. 116.

⁶⁷ Anon., ‘Red Devils to Sport New Official T-Shirt and Slogan’, *Chosun Entertainment*, 2 January 2006 <http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2006/01/02/2006010261003.html> [accessed 15 June 2020].

⁶⁸ MacCormack, ‘An Ethics of Spectatorship’, p. 142.

ideology to do so, stating that ‘the state could manage its population with less coercion and violence by imposing the social discipline throughout society and creating more obedient and industrious subject’.⁶⁹ ‘Industrious’ is the operative word here, and serves to highlight why the ‘Be the Reds’ scene is so important. ‘Be the Reds’ is associated implicitly with a form of national identity that is set in opposition to the so-called ‘*Purangin*’, figured by contrast as lazy, spendthrift, and thus less deserving of life, in the necropolitical system. This is evident when it comes to the verbal exchange between ‘Be the Reds’ and the homeless man:

Be the Reds: You bastards! I worked for my country! I’m different from you trash! You are all useless! I don’t know how I got myself mixed up with you all! It looks like the commies are behind this! But me? I don’t deserve to die here! I dedicated my life to this country! I’m a good person. I’m a good person.

Homeless man: Out of my way. Dammit! I’m the same too! I made sacrifices for this country! So how did I end up this way? Know why? Because this country doesn’t care about us! But we worked ourselves to death, you fools! But the thing is, I must survive! I want to live!⁷⁰

This kind of social anxiety is currently present in South Korea; there is a pervasive feeling that being economically productive means that one is a ‘good’ member of South-Korean society. This may be why this necropolitical narrative is far more pronounced in South-Korean horror movies than in Western media texts, and why cinesexuality becomes important as a tool for analysis: a cinesexuality lens allows us to interpret why narratives are culturally relevant to those who view them rather than assuming, in this case, that all zombie narratives are about over-consumption. In South Korea, as Arita’s study suggests, the urban middle class and ‘Be the Reds’ class system is ‘largely closed to intragenerational inflow mobility’, to the extent that ‘garnering [a white-collar] job is greatly dependent upon a person’s level of education’.⁷¹ *Train to Busan* and *Seoul Station*’s use of zombies, and the interactions between those who are fleeing them, present to the spectator the necropolitical labour of the extra-cinematic South Korea. Therefore, a South-Korean audience may find cinesexual catharsis in seeing a character proclaiming that economic productivity should not be the main aim of social collectivism in South Korea, especially given the educational and social obstacles that prevent many from achieving this ideal.⁷² This is a

⁶⁹ Yang, p. 492.

⁷⁰ *Seoul Station*, 01:07:56-01:09:23.

⁷¹ Arita, p. 218.

⁷² *Ibid.*

theme evident in other South-Korean movies such as *Deranged*, in which the main character Jae-hyuk is positioned to be viewed sympathetically by the spectator, because he lost his life savings and job at a university due to a bad investment on the stock market, following which he is shamed into taking a job as a pharmaceutical sales representative.⁷³ He has access to one of the last boxes of the cure for the parasite and instead of saving it for himself, he tries to give away some of the medicine to an ill mother and child. The implication here is that Jae-Hyuk is on the side of collectivism rather than capitalist individuality, and thus is a character who may resonate cinesexually with South-Korean viewers. For much the same reason, we are encouraged to grow to like Seok-woo later in *Train to Busan* because he tries to save/look after not only himself but his daughter, a *Purangin*, a pregnant woman, her husband, and two young teenagers. Instead of passively watching the film, spectators may therefore engage in an ethical reading, via cinesexuality.

Conclusion: Ethical Viewing Practices as Resistance

A cinesexual framework allows us to investigate how spectators may make ethical judgments when watching *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan*; in cinesexual terms, it is important to evaluate the cultural importance of narrative choices and their effects on spectatorship. This essay has argued that the representation of homelessness and labour versus the political elite has a specific significance to South Koreans and may influence how they view the film. Within a cinesexuality framework of the kind outlined here, spectators of *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* can see the infected zombies as politically allegorical; death by zombie doesn't mean a physical death but is a representation to the viewer of how groups such as the *Purangin*, and those in the harsh corporate culture permeating South-Korean workplaces, are being sacrificed already through necropolitics. As MacCormack notes,

When we desire cinesexually we must think what extra-cinesexual social relations and intensities the break away from dialectic communication will affect. As the fold of image and spectator demands a rethinking of human subjectivity so too does this third trajectory affect social relations.⁷⁴

⁷³ Paul G. Bens, 'Movie Review: *Deranged* (2012)', *Nameless Digest*, 19 February 2017 <<https://www.namelessdigest.com/movie-review-deranged-2012/>> [accessed 1 October 2019].

⁷⁴ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 143.

Scholars focusing on Western media texts note that zombies tend to function ‘as metaphors for American anxieties over potential catastrophes, ranging from viral pandemics to global warming to alienation to consumer society’, as well as demonstrating the ‘limitations of social structures and patriarchy’.⁷⁵ In Western zombie movies, seeing a rich person get eaten by zombies and the plucky working-class under-dog survive is a common theme; scenes such as this appear in TV shows such as *Dead Set*, *Z-Nation*, and in the film *Land of the Dead*.⁷⁶ For Henry Giroux and Dendle, these representations are familiar and sometimes even cathartic due to a well-established social-class system, which some see as unfair.⁷⁷ In a similar way, but with important cultural differences, as has been argued here, *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* are effective in cinesexual terms for South-Korean viewers because they encourage the spectators to form ethical judgements on the characters through their own cultural lens.

The zombie-as-metaphor is becoming increasingly utilised to describe necropolitical spheres. Giroux proposes that ‘zombie politics’ is an apt descriptor to describe the way that politicians in the United States often make decisions that increase human suffering, making some people more likely to live or die.⁷⁸ MacCormack’s cinesexuality theory prompts the spectator to make a ‘decision toward openness and grace or reification of subject and object through perception via pre-formed signification’.⁷⁹ Thus ‘zombie politics’ can be situated as central to the experience of watching *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan*, which is subject to a specific negotiation of the South-Korean environment, subjectivity, and social relations. In the process, the figure of the zombie in these films serves to create an ethical viewership, in MacCormack’s terms.

Death images are important in that, as mentioned previously by MacCormack, zombies do not depict a literal death but a change, in thinking and in action. As I have argued here, *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* use zombies as an important narrative tool to dramatise social forces in South Korea. For Shaviro, zombie narratives in general enable spectators to understand and sometimes resist those that are acting upon them:

⁷⁵ Ho, ‘The Model Minority’, p. 59.

⁷⁶ *Deadset*, dir. by Yann Demange (Zeppotron, 27-31 October 2008); *Z-Nation*, pro. by Karl Schaefer (The Asylum, 2014-18); and Romero (2008).

⁷⁷ Dendle, ‘The Zombie as Barometer’, p. 47

⁷⁸ Henry A. Giroux, ‘Zombie Politics and Other Late Modern Monstrosities in the Age of Disposability’, *Policy Futures in Education*, 8.1 (2010), 1-7 (p. 1).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The zombies do not [...] stand for a threat to social order from without. Rather, they resonate with, and refigure, the very processes that produce and enforce social order. That is to say, they do not mirror or represent social forces; they are directly animated and possessed, even in their allegorical distance from beyond the grave, by such forces.⁸⁰

Kevin Boon argues that ‘the zombie [...] is the most fully realized articulation of this dynamic interdependency between the human self and the monstrous other’.⁸¹ However, it has been argued in this article that the zombies in *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* do not occupy a binary between human and the Other for the spectator. A more accurate way to describe these zombies comes from Dendle, who asserts that ‘the essence of the “zombie” at the most abstract level is supplanted, stolen, or effaced consciousness; it casts allegorically the appropriation of one person’s will by that of another’.⁸² I have argued that cinesexual enjoyment of zombies allowed South Koreans to ‘become’ the Other, to experience the necropolitics being enacted in their culture. Moreover, Lazendorfer has noted that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari use zombies to ‘signify the particular relation between death and capital that modern life has produced: they are “a work myth”’.⁸³ The relation between class warfare and labour discussed here is evident not only in *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* but is a common narrative in other films such as *Flu* and *Deranged*, all of which use zombies to make that relation explicit.

Seoul Station and *Train to Busan* can therefore be read as critiques of South-Korean culture, and investigating the cinesexual experiences of spectators renders this critique even more explicit, as does situating it within necropolitics and politically motivated ethical arguments as to ‘who should live and who should die’. A possible explanation for the popularity of zombie narratives may be found in the frequency with which those who are typically ‘saved’ by necropolitics in the real world (the wealthy, the oppressors) rarely share this opportunistic fate in the zombie movie. In *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* (and the other South-Korean movies referenced here), the rich are just as likely to become a zombie as anyone else. For cinesexual spectators, this is just one of the many pleasures available while watching these films.

Zombies in *Seoul Station* and *Train to Busan* create a repulsion-versus-desire effect; the zombies represent the aspirations of current South-Korean culture (to be mindlessly

⁸⁰ Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, p. 100.

⁸¹ Boon, ‘Ontological Anxiety’, p. 34.

⁸² Dendle, ‘The Zombie as Barometer’, p. 47.

⁸³ Lazendorfer, *Books of the Dead*, p. 1.

economically active and individualistic), but also image the negative social forces that result from these aspirations; they represent social issues, but also a desire to change. For Huntley, horror is one of the areas in which cinesexuality challenges spectatorship, in that on-screen deaths ask significant questions about images of death.⁸⁴ Zombie narratives are important ethically because they require the spectator to answer questions about what the zombies represent:

These films are about death, corroding, rotting and dishevelled flesh, about breakdown and dysfunctions of narrative, body, society and reality. That's the very point. What does it mean to live the organized body, society and cinematic image as part of coherent narrative film? These images show the death of what?⁸⁵

Therefore, it remains important to analyse zombie films through a cinesexual framework, as doing so helps to reveal how different spectators may perceive deaths differently.

⁸⁴ Huntley, 'Abstraction is Ethical', p. 19.

⁸⁵ MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, p. 116.